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TESTIMONY OF THE

BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION

SUBMITTED TO THE

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

MARCH 16, 2009

Testimony of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition to the Public Health Committee

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony to the Public Health Committee of the 2009 General Assembly regarding Raised Bill 6675 to Increase Access to Health Care in Connecticut.

We urge the Public Health Committee not to make cuts in the HUSKY program proposed by Governor Rell in her 2009-10 budget. If cuts are made, they will jeopardize the state's ability to access federal reimbursement of health care services through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009.

We know that the state is facing a huge deficit. However, cutting services for children and their parents on HUSKY will not save the state money. What these cuts will do is reduce federal matching dollars coming to the state and put children and their families at risk of losing needed health services.

Medicaid and HUSKY

The Governor has proposed \$300 million in cuts to the HUSKY program. The cuts include additional out-of-pocket costs for low-income parents and policy changes that will reduce enrollment. As a result of these proposed changes, children and their families will either not sign up for HUSKY even if they are eligible, lose coverage if they currently have it, or be unable to afford or access needed medical care. What is particularly disturbing is that these cuts are being proposed at a time when we could increase federal reimbursement for Medicaid through the economic stimulus package and expanded SCHIP, the state children's health insurance program.

We strongly urge that budget cuts or policy changes not be made that will limit access to HUSKY. We have been working long and hard in the community to ensure that low-income children and their families have access to health care. Without health coverage, parents and children will forgo needed medical care and medicine until there is a crisis. The state will end up paying for the cost of care, but at a much higher price.

Barriers to eligibility and enrollment in HUSKY will mean fewer children and parents in the program. Fewer children and parents on HUSKY will mean the state will not be able to take advantage of all available federal matching dollars.

Specifically, we urge support for the following HUSKY programs:

Continuation of state-funded medical assistance to legal immigrants living in this country for less than five years: Since 2004, Connecticut has been providing health care to legal immigrants regardless of when they arrived in this country. The Governor is proposing to eliminate this coverage even though most of the cost of health care will be reimbursed by the federal government through the newly expanded SCHIP.

Full dental coverage for adults on Medicaid: The Governor is proposing to cover only emergency dental care for adults. Good dental care is integral to good health. Untreated dental conditions can lead to diabetes, heart disease and blood infections. Without coverage, many adults will forgo preventive dental care and end up needing more costly emergency care.

Full access to dental care for children on HUSKY without prior authorization: Requiring prior authorization as recommended by the Governor will create an unnecessary barrier and delay

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care, preventing children from getting the dental services they need in a timely manner. We know of no dental insurance plans that require preauthorization for preventive and routine care.

No premiums or co-pays for low-income parents on HUSKY or increases in premiums for children on HUSKY B: When the state imposed co-pays on office visits and prescriptions several years ago, thousands went without care because they could not afford the additional out-of-pocket costs.

Medical interpretation services to ensure that families who do not speak English as their first language understand doctor's orders and can comply with needed treatment. In Bridgeport, over 70 different languages are spoken in our schools. Not only are translation services critically needed, federal funds to pay for medical interpretation services were included in the SCHIP reauthorization.

Self-declaration of income: Self-declaration of income reduces administrative paperwork for the state Department of Social Services. The state can verify income through electronic databases.

Support for community-based outreach, especially during the transition to new HUSKY health plans and rising unemployment rates. Outreach will be more important than ever as more parents lose their jobs and their health insurance. We constantly meet newly uninsured parents who do not know that HUSKY is a viable option for their children and themselves. We also urge continued support for Healthy Start. Access to prenatal care is one of the most critical determinants of a healthy birth outcome.

Regular independent performance assessments conducted by Connecticut Voices to ensure accountability and access to care in the HUSKY program. Those of us in the community rely on the reports and data analysis from Connecticut Voices to ensure that children and their parents are able to access preventive health and dental care and treatment through HUSKY. Monitoring is especially important during this time of major changes in administration of the HUSKY program.

The Governor's proposal to cut HUSKY is a short-sighted attempt to simply cut down on costs without regard for the health of children and families, long-term savings from appropriate intervention and increased federal reimbursements through the federal stimulus package and SCHIP.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony.

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The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) is a non-profit coalition of 80 member organizations funded in 1985. Our members represent a broad range of agencies including community centers, counseling organizations, early childhood programs, health centers, hospitals, churches and synagogues, and parent and civic organizations.